

News Archives

International pancreatic cancer researcher to join Indiana University as the first Myles Brand Professor of Cancer Research



Dr. Korc

INDIANAPOLIS -- (September 15, 2011) -- Internationally recognized cancer researcher Murray Korc, M.D., will join the Indiana University Melvin and Bren Simon Cancer Center as the first Myles Brand Professor of Cancer Research on Oct. 1.

Dr. Korc currently is the scientific leader of the Pancreatic Cancer Group at the Dartmouth-Hitchcock Norris Cotton Cancer Center in Lebanon, N.H.

“Pancreatic cancer takes far too many lives each year. We have much to do. For Dr. Murray Korc, pancreatic cancer research is a calling. His life-long dedication researching pancreatic cancer and his intellectual curiosity will enable us at the IU Simon Cancer Center to contribute much to this all-too-common deadly disease,” said Patrick J. Loehrer Sr., M.D., director of the IU Simon Cancer Center, H.H. Gregg Professor of Oncology and associate dean for cancer research at the Indiana University School of Medicine.

The Myles Brand Professorship was created to help physicians and scientists at the IU Simon Cancer Center to continue investigating devastating malignancies, such as pancreatic cancer, which claimed the life of Brand, the 16th president of Indiana University.

Dr. Korc, who will move his research laboratory to IU, is one of the first researchers to receive incentive funding made possible through Lilly Endowment’s gift to create the Physician Scientist Initiative. To capitalize on the unique talents that skilled investigators with medical degrees bring to scientific research, the IU School of Medicine created the Initiative, which is supported by a \$60 million grant from the Lilly Endowment.

In 2011, an estimated 44,030 new cases of pancreatic cancer are expected to occur in the United States and nearly 755 Hoosiers will be diagnosed with the disease. An estimated 37,660 deaths are expected from the disease in 2011, including 810 in Indiana. The purpose of the Brand Professorship is to fund and encourage research that may one day lead to a cure.

Brand served as IU’s president from 1994 to 2002 and was president of the NCAA from January 2003 until his death on Sept. 16, 2009, at the age of 67. IU President Michael A. McRobbie announced the campaign to

create the endowed faculty chair in cancer research during the public tribute to Brand.

The announcement of Dr. Korc's new position comes on the eve of the second anniversary of the death of Brand and of Melvin Simon, who also died of pancreatic cancer. Simon, the shopping mall developer and philanthropist, along with his wife, Bren, pledged \$50 million to name the Indiana University Melvin and Bren Simon Cancer Center.

"Creation of an endowed fund to benefit cancer research will serve as a permanent, meaningful tribute to Myles Brand and provide hope to the nearly 1.5 million Americans who are diagnosed with cancer each year," said President McRobbie. "I am delighted to be able to welcome a scientist of the caliber of Murray Korc to the university as the first Myles Brand Professor."

"I feel humbled by the privilege of having been selected as the first physician-scientist to be the inaugural Myles Brand Professor, a position created to honor the memory and legacy of a transformative leader who championed academic excellence and integrity," said Dr. Korc. "I hope to work with my colleagues to design strategies for early pancreatic cancer detection, improved prevention and treatment modalities, and meaningful prolongation of pain-free survival." Dr. Korc also will hold the titles of IU professor of medicine and of biochemistry and molecular biology.

Dr. Korc's research has been continuously funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) since 1981. His focus is on aberrant growth-factor signaling in pancreatic cancer and genetic mouse models of pancreatic cancer, with the goal of designing novel therapeutic strategies. He has published more than 250 peer-reviewed manuscripts, and he is internationally recognized for his seminal contributions to the understanding

of the role of the EGF receptor and transforming growth factor-beta in pancreatic cancer, work recently recognized by an NIH MERIT award. The NIH presents the highly-selective MERIT Awards to researchers who demonstrate superior competence and outstanding productivity in research endeavors.

Dr. Korc comes to IU from Dartmouth Medical School where he currently is the Joseph M. Huber Professor of Medicine and a professor of pharmacology and toxicology at The Dartmouth Institute for Health Policy and Clinical Practice. Since 2003, he has served as chair of the Dartmouth Hitchcock Medical Center Department of Medicine and as a member of the Section of Endocrinology. From 2008 to 2010, he was the associate dean for clinical and translational research at Dartmouth.

Dr. Korc received his medical degree in 1974 from Albany Medical College in Albany, N Y. He completed internal medicine training at Albany Medical Center Hospital in 1977 and an endocrinology fellowship in 1979 at the University of California, San Francisco.

Honorary chairs for the Brand Chair campaign were McRobbie; U.S. Sens. Evan Bayh and Richard Lugar; Indiana Gov. Mitch Daniels; NBA Commissioner David Stern; George Bodenheimer, president of ESPN Inc. and ABC Sports; the late William Cook, Cook Group founder; Daniel F. Evans Jr., president and chief executive officer, IU Health; Stephen L. Ferguson, chairman of the board of Cook Group and a member of the IU Board of Trustees; and Sean McManus, president of CBS News and Sports.

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September 2011

Cardiovascular drug may offer new treatment for some difficult types of leukemia

A drug now prescribed for cardiovascular problems could become a new tool in physicians' arsenals to attack certain types of leukemia that so far have evaded effective treatments, researchers say.

The drug, Fasudil, has been used to treat stroke patients because it is a vasodilator, meaning it dilates blood vessels. However, its potential in leukemia emerged because its method of action is blocking the activity of a protein called Rho kinase, or ROCK.

ROCK, which plays a role in a variety of cellular activities, attracted the attention of the national research team led by Reuben Kapur, PhD, as they were studying the effects of mutations in several other proteins that are associated with difficult-to-treat types of leukemia. Those mutations, experiments revealed, resulted in hyperactivation of ROCK.



Kapur

The group reported its findings in the Sept. 13 issue of the journal *Cancer Cell*, which was published online Sept. 12.

"There's been a push to identify targets that get revved up as a result of the mutations we find in the leukemia cells, and we found that ROCK appeared to be hyperactive. Fasudil is available and targets ROCK, but its possible effectiveness as an anti-leukemia agent had not been tested," Dr. Kapur, who is also an investigator at the Herman B Wells Center for Pediatric Research, said. "Many of these leukemia patients are older, especially those with acute myelogenous leukemia, and they undergo extensive chemotherapy. If we could find other ways of treating them that would be more tolerable, that would be useful for older populations."

Leukemia covers a broad range of diseases involving excess production of immature white blood cells. The research team investigated the ramifications of mutations in genes for two receptor proteins known as KIT and FLT3. They also studied the effects of BCR-ABL, a protein produced when parts of two chromosomes swap places, an abnormality that is associated with chronic myelogenous leukemia. KIT, FLT3, and BCR-ABL are known as oncogenes due to their potential to cause cancer.

In each case, blood-producing bone marrow cells with the mutations all had hyperactivated levels of ROCK. The researchers then were able to slow the growth of those cells in laboratory tests by using the ROCK inhibitor, Fasudil.

Similarly, the drug significantly prolonged the survival of laboratory mice with leukemia.

Further testing is necessary, but the investigators found the results promising, Dr. Kapur said.

"This drug could be fairly potent across the board with a lot of leukemias," he said. "Whether alone or in combination with existing therapies, it could have a lot of potential."

Additional research was contributed by investigators at Genentech Inc., the Cleveland Clinic, the Broad Institute of MIT and Harvard, and Northwestern University.

Funding for the research was provided by the National Institutes of Health and the Riley Children's Foundation.

--Eric Schoch



September 2011

News briefs

Conquer Cancer Foundation honors Dr. Schneider

The Conquer Cancer Foundation of the American Society of Clinical Oncology (ASCO) (formerly The ASCO Cancer Foundation) selected Bryan Schneider, MD, as the recipient of the 2011 Advanced Clinical Research Award (ACRA) in Breast Cancer.

[more](#) 



Schneider

Indiana CTSI provides \$500,000 to support cancer research at IU, Purdue

Using additional grant support received from the Clinical and Translational Sciences Award of the National Institutes of Health, the Indiana Clinical and Translational Sciences Institute will provide \$500,000 to expand the fight against colorectal cancer from the state's urban center to suburban and rural Indiana.

[more](#) 

Cancer center members in the news

Rafat Siddiqui, PhD, has been named to the editorial board of *Advances in Biological Chemistry*.

Harikrishna Nakshatri, BVSc, PhD, presented "The Impact of Estrogen-Insulin/Growth Factor Cross-Talk in Breast Cancer" during the Sept. 8 Tulane Cancer Center Invited Speaker Series.

Janet Carpenter, PhD, RN, FAAN, has been appointed to the Sally Reahard Chair in the IU School of Nursing's Center for Enhancing Quality of Life in Chronic Illness. Over the past 15 years, Dr. Carpenter has demonstrated a remarkably consistent commitment to research, specifically in the area of oncology and women's health. Although best known for her work in understanding, measuring, and managing menopausal symptoms in women following breast cancer, she has expanded that work to help midlife women



Carpenter

without cancer manage their menopausal symptoms. She is currently PI of an R01 from the NCI, testing breathing interventions to alleviate menopausal hot flashes, sleep, and mood disturbances in midlife women and women with breast cancer. In addition, she is site PI of a multi-site U01 from NIA and other NIH agencies that establishes the MsFLASH research network. This network is conducting multiple studies testing different pharmacological and non-pharmacological treatments for menopause in healthy midlife women.

Reminders

- **Purdue hosts "Drug Delivery and Cancer" in October; registration deadline is Sept. 30**
Purdue University Center for Cancer Research is hosting "Drug Delivery and Cancer: Challenges and New Directions for Cancer Therapy" Oct. 10-11. The objective of this workshop is different than most: rather than discuss recent successes in drug delivery, it focuses on unsolved problems that impede progress and to determine why so many promising leads have failed to produce major improvements in cancer chemotherapy. An international panel of experts will present their perspectives on practical problems in drug delivery. By holding an honest and introspective discourse on the present limitations in drug delivery research, we can better define the factors that have kept promising drug delivery systems from achieving their full potential. The registration deadline is Sept. 30. The fees are \$20 for undergraduate and graduate students; \$40 for non-students/professionals. To register, visit www.conf.purdue.edu/DDC. For more information, visit www.cancerresearch.purdue.edu/events/ddc.
- **Membership criteria changes**
IU Simon Cancer Center membership criteria, benefits, and responsibilities have been updated. Membership in the IU Simon Cancer Center is open to full-time faculty of Indiana University or IUPUI who contribute on some level to the overall mission of the cancer center in areas of research, education, patient care, or community outreach. [Learn more](#).
- **Grants available to researchers**
For the latest grant opportunities, visit the [Funding Opportunities](#) page on the IUSCC Web site.

New members

[Monet Bowling, MD](#)

Department of Surgery

Associate member, Breast Cancer

[Hong Du, PhD](#)

Department of Pathology and Laboratory Medicine
Full member, Tumor Microenvironment and Metastases

[Lida Mina, MD](#)

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Associate member, Breast Cancer

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Affiliate member